DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 121 RC 021 022

AUTHOR Cutbirth, Denise; Benge, Beverly
TITLE Using Q Methodological Studies To Investigate Attitudes of Educators and of Students with Disabilities toward Inclusion.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 8p.; In: Promoting Progress in Times of Change: Rural Communities Leading the Way; see RC 020 986.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Environment; Disabilities; *Educational Attitudes; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; Q Methodology; Regular and Special Education Relationship; Rural Schools; *Special Education; *Student Attitudes; Student Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

Two Q-sort surveys examined perceptions about inclusive classrooms among 40 rural special education and regular education students, aged 12-19, and among 59 educators from metropolitan and rural school districts. Educators included preservice teachers, administrators, and teachers experienced in elementary through higher education; 41 percent were directly involved in special education. The majority of students indicated negative perceptions of membership in an inclusive classroom setting. Six student factor arrays were generated representing distinct points of view, but none supported full inclusion. Negative perceptions cut across the categories of curriculum, peer interaction, teacher interaction, teaching style, learning style, and self-concept. The attitudes of both disabled and nondisabled students toward inclusive regular education classes were more negative than positive. As in the student study, no teacher factor array supported the placement of all children in general education classrooms. Experience within the classroom did not create a different perspective concerning inclusion. No major differences were found between the beliefs of special and regular education teachers; rather decisions concerning placement of students with disabilities appeared to be based more on subjective beliefs than on teaching specialization. These studies verify that both students and teachers have fundamental problems with inclusive classrooms. The only clear consensus was that full inclusion was impractical in serving the needs of students. (TD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DIANE MONTGOMERY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Denise Cutbirth
Beverly Benge
Stillwater, Oklahoma

USING Q METHODOLOGICAL STUDIES TO INVESTIGATE ATTITUDES OF EDUCATORS AND OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TOWARD INCLUSION

ED 406 121

While exceptional individuals of many kinds have been identified by their ordinary fellow human beings since the beginning of recorded history, until the nineteenth century few attempts were made to teach them (Hewett & Forness, 1977). As the rights of these exceptional individuals were realized, special education evolved as a comprehensive attempt to deliver educational services to children with disabilities. The number of students with disabilities receiving special instruction and services in schools in the United States on any given day is currently about 4.4 million, representing around 6.5% of the total school-age population (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1991).

The mainstreaming model of instruction, used extensively in the 1970's and 1980's, was designed to meet the mandate of IDEA in providing education for children with disabilities. The failure of the mainstreaming model to meet the intent of federal legislation (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995) has resulted in the current inclusive movement to include more children with special needs in regular education classrooms. The 17th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA revealed that during the last five years regular class placement for special needs students has increased by ten percentage points, while resource room placement has decreased. Currently, 71.5 percent of students requiring special education services are now receiving some proportion of their education in general education classes (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1996). More school districts today are educating students in general education classrooms rather than the traditional pull-out or resource class programs.

With this increased number of general education placements, the need to understand the educational environment into which children with disabilities are placed and expected to thrive likewise increases. Although extensive research has been done on inclusion, examining the view students with disabilities take toward regular education and the view teachers have of inclusive educational practices may provide insight into the effect of inclusion upon a free, appropriate public education. The purpose of this paper is to review two research studies delineating the perceptions of the primary participants within the inclusion process, students and teachers.

THEORY

The increasing number of general education placements for students with disabilities under the inclusion model warrants a careful study of the classroom environment into which these children are being placed. Students do not view inclusion in the same way as adults and should be consulted about academic programming. If success

RC 021022

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

and failure to learn are at least partly attributed to learners, then the students' perceptions of teaching practices need to be discerned (Blumenfeld, Hamilton, Bossert, Wessels, & Meece, 1983). Assessment of classroom interaction through the students' perceptions is highly valid since they are the targets of teacher behavior and their (subjective) experience is what really counts (Babad, 1990). For example, one research study found that certain teaching adaptations that seem desirable and were commonly used by educators proved less desirable to students. These teaching style adaptations included using different textbooks, using different tests, and modifying homework assignments. Students preferred adaptations, however, in teacher interaction, including teachers working more closely with students. High achievers were more likely to prefer teaching adaptation than were low achievers. Students who most needed adaptations, therefore, were more likely to prefer teachers who did not make adaptations (Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos and Gordon, 1993).

In addition to students' perceptions, teachers' attitudes impact teacher behavior and resultant student behavior and achievement within a classroom. In a study investigating attitudes of general education teachers toward students with learning disabilities included in their classrooms, teachers expressed negative reactions to inclusion. They felt that students with learning difficulties should fit in with the educational program implemented for the class as a whole and not receive a specially designed, individualized program (Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon & Rothlein, 1994). Since students are placed in special education because of an inability to be successful in an unmodified general education curriculum, success of an inclusive placement seems dependent on general education teachers' ability and willingness to make adaptations to accommodate individual differences. Forcing students with learning difficulties to fit in with whole class instruction seems unlikely to lead to a successful placement and could be educationally detrimental to a student with a disability.

Concurrent with the impact of the perceptions of students and teachers, educational setting may influence the success of inclusive placements. Data has suggested that rural students are more at risk for academic and behavioral problems than urban and suburban students (Huebner & Wise, 1992). Research has shown that enrolling students with disabilities in regular classes resulted in a high rate of failure and dropout among this population (Zigmond & Thornton, 1985). Within a rural setting, the practice of inclusion is not always implemented with the array of support services available in settings with larger populations. Inclusive placement may be harder, therefore, to successfully attain for rural students with disabilities.

Educational practitioners and researchers have become aware of the importance of student and teacher perceptions of performance as determinants of behavior (Levine and Wang, 1983). In order to explore the social world in which the school exists and the beliefs and attitudes that provide the basis for interpreting interventions in special education, the need exists to rely on other than empirical, objective methods. The use of interpretive, subjective research methods permits examination of ideas such as intentionality, consciousness, belief systems, and mental states in order to enrich understanding of these instructional issues in special education. According to Meyen and Skrtic (1995), ". . .people participating in programs define their own involvement. These definitions, not the ideas and wishes of program planners, determine how participants act

toward a program and its effect on them." Subjective research employs a phenomenological, constructivist perspective, where the meaning of social reality is perceived as created within a specific context of social interaction (Reid, Robinson & Bunsen, 1995).

METHOD

Investigation of the perceptions of students and teachers concerning inclusive educational classrooms was accomplished using Q method techniques. Employing both quantitative correlational and factor-analytic techniques with an in-depth qualitative search for subjective meaning, Q methodology allows respondents to self-define tacit knowledge (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

Subjects. Forty students, ages twelve through nineteen, took part in the first study. All were enrolled in a rural school district. Students included those currently served in the special education categories of specific learning disability, serious emotional disturbance, and mental retardation, as well as students from regular education. All of the students with disabilities have been served within special education programs for at least two years. None of the students has ever been served solely in a special education setting; all have been included for at least a portion of the day in inclusive education classrooms.

In the second study, teachers with elementary, middle school, secondary and higher education experience from both metropolitan and rural school districts, preservice teachers, and administrators were invited to participate. Fifty-nine educators and preservice teachers responded, with 41 percent of the sample being directly associated with special education.

Instruments. The list of statements for the Q-sort instrument in each study was developed from the domain of inclusive educational practice and theory. A population of items called a concourse (Brown, 1980) was drawn from literary sources. Each concourse was reviewed by student and teacher representatives respectively. Conventional items, the statements from literature and theory, and naturalistic items, the statements gathered from representative review, were combined to form what is termed a hybrid or mixed sample (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

Each concourse was categorized for aid in interpretation. The students' concourse was defined by the categories curriculum, peer interaction, teacher interaction, teaching style, learning style, and self-concept. The teachers' concourse represented statements concerning academic aspects, socialization factors, legal rights issues, and integrative principles.

Procedure. The Q-sorts were administered on an individual basis. Respondents were asked to rank all items in the concourse until all opinion statements lay on a continuum from most like to most unlike their perceptions about inclusion. A distribution matrix was provided to facilitate the Q-sorting. An important step in Q methodology after data are analyzed is the confirming interview (Brown, 1980). Participants whose Q-sorts had extreme loadings, either high or low, were interviewed to determine if the interpretation of the Q-sort accurately reflected individual points of view.

RESULTS

Once all respondent Q-sorts were collected, data were analyzed using three statistical procedures: correlation, factor analysis, and computation of factor scores. Initially, the sorts were coded and entered into the computer program pcq3 by Stricklin (1993). A correlation matrix was computed for each study, reflection was performed, and factors were identified for varimax rotation. The presence of factors represents a unique point of view (McKeown & Thomas, 1988) and indicates persons who rank-ordered the statements in essentially the same fashion.

In the student study, theoretical profiles fell into six factor arrays. The six factors were designated as Competent Student, Separatist Student, Confident Student, Nonconformist Student, Paradoxical Student, and Curricular Student. The theoretical profile of students on Factor A indicated a comfort level in inclusive regular education classes. The Competent Student perceived that the requisite ability to learn, function, and respond are present in this setting. Students on Factor B envisaged a separate system of class rules for different students. The Separatist Student also admitted to being distracted by what was happening in the classroom environment. Students on Factor C, The Confident Student, were able to comprehend class material at the rate it was presented. They felt comfortable around the other students in class and perceived themselves as accepted group members. Students on Factor D did not feel confident in their ability to succeed in school, nor did they indicate recognition of personal responsibility for this fact. The Nonconformist Student did not see the work in inclusive classrooms as interesting or useful. The profile of students on Factor E showed that they too did not feel schoolwork was interesting. The Paradoxical Student felt that the teacher did not help them correctly begin assignments but did feel that the teacher liked having the student in class. Students on Factor F, The Curricular Student, were the only participants who stated that they felt the schoolwork was interesting. They did not feel that other members of the inclusive classroom listened to ideas they might have. All students loading on this factor were categorized Mentally Retarded.

In the teacher study, analysis yielded a four factor solution. The four factors were designated Philosophists, Local Decision-Makers, Individualists, and Socialists. Philosophists were strongly idealistic, supported inclusion as a means of promoting acceptance for all students within the school community, and felt teachers are obligated to meet all needs of children within the general education setting. Local Decision-Makers placed premium importance on the unfairness of legally forced placements and desired to retain local control of all educational placements. Additionally, they would place special needs students in general education classes only if the student's ability allowed equal performance on the same assignments as nondisabled students. Individualists, as their name implies, gave prominence to the individual rights of each student and would decide placement on a singular, personal basis only. Individualists, unlike Philosophists, saw successful placement of some children in general education classrooms as possible while promoting resource room placement for other children. Finally, Socialists viewed the need for socialization as the primary impetus for inclusive placement; placement may be in an inclusive classroom or a resource room depending upon the social needs of the student.

DISCUSSION

Several conclusions were signified from the student study. The majority of students in the study (82%) indicated negative perceptions of membership in an inclusive classroom setting. This dissatisfaction was expressed by Competent Students, Separatist Students, Confident Students, Nonconformist Students, Paradoxical Students, and Students, Confident Students, Nonconformist Students, Paradoxical Students, and Curricular Students. None of the six factors supported full inclusion.

Additionally, negative perceptions cut across all six concourse categories. Curriculum, peer interaction, teacher interaction, teaching style, learning style, and self-concept were all rated as areas of concern. Examples of student distress in each area included the following: schoolwork did not seem interesting or important to present or future lives, other students did not listen to their ideas, the teacher had different rules for different students, instructional material was not presented in a way that promoted understanding and was presented too quickly for understanding, there were a number of distractions that interfered with learning, and they were not able to cope with school as easily as other students.

Overall, the perceptions of special education students and general education students toward regular education (inclusive) classrooms showed some continuity of belief. Regular education students identified with five of the six factors. Special education students identified with six of the six factors. The perceptions of students with disabilities toward inclusive regular education classes were more negative than positive. The perceptions of students without disabilities toward these classes were equally negative.

Several conclusions were drawn from the study of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. As in the student study, no factor identified with the placement of all children in general education classrooms. Individualists, Philosophists and Socialists expressed agreement that children need a wide range of possible placements to accommodate individual traits, while local decision-makers did not support inclusion at all.

A second conclusion concerning beliefs of preservice and inservice teachers was determined. Although logic would seem to indicate that experience within the classroom would create a more realistic and therefore different perspective concerning inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education classrooms, this proved not to be the case. Graduate and undergraduate respondents loaded on all four factors identified within this study. Approximately 50 percent of the significant loadings were undergraduates and fifty percent were from the graduate segment of the sample.

As to the differences between the beliefs of general education teachers and special education teachers, more special education teachers identified with the philosophist viewpoint; more teachers with general education certification identified with the local decision-makers. No factor, however, was completely identified with either specialization and no clear conclusion can be drawn to indicate major differences between the beliefs of special and general education teachers. It seems evident that decisions concerning placement of children with disabilities are based more on subjective beliefs than on a field of teaching specialization.

Implications of these studies are several. Inclusion continues to be a very divisive issue in education. These two studies have verified that students and teachers have

fundamental problems with inclusive classrooms. Whether the student was served in general or special education, whether the teacher was certified in general or special education, preservice or inservice, the only clear consensus of viewpoint was that full inclusion was impractical in serving the needs of students.

The inclusive movement appears to be more than a temporary reform which has appeared on the educational scene. A restructuring of the separate general and special education systems into a unitary system of public education has been proposed. If barriers separating students with disabilities and students without disabilities are to be fully eliminated, instruction and other services must be provided in natural settings where all students are included (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995). Within inclusive classrooms, students indicated the perception that membership was socially and educationally unsatisfactory. Their lives are being negatively affected today, as some are being placed in general education classes with untrained teachers who are angry at being forced to receive within their class a student with disabilities. The theoretical implications of this research, within the setting of public education, imply that there appears to be no one item or group of items to fix in order to improve inclusive regular classroom membership for students or teachers. Even more serious, however, than the unease that this view may cause is the implication that there is no clear direction to improve the theoretical model upon which special education is based. Just as in the past mainstreaming failed to meet the needs of students with disabilities, these studies appear to confirm the inability of inclusive settings to meet the needs of special students. The debate concerning mainstreaming was far less divisive than the inclusion debate because, although mainstreaming was radical for its time, it was far less ambitious than inclusion and there was less to lose in terms of hard-won special education rights, resources, and recognition (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995).

REFERENCES

Badad, E. (1990). Calling on students: How a teacher's behavior can acquire disparate meanings in students' minds. Journal of Classroom Interaction, 25, 1-4.

Blumenfeld, V. Hamilton, V. L., Bossert, S. T., Wessels, K., & Meece, J. (1983). Teacher talk and student thought: Socialization into the student role. In J. M. Levine & M. C. Wang (Eds.), Teacher and student perceptions: Implications for learning, (pp. 143-192). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Brown, S. (1980). Political Subjectivity: Applications of Q Methodology in Political Science. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Hewett, R. M., & Forness, S. R. (1977). Education of exceptional learners (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Huebner, E. S., & Wise, P. S. (1992). Training preservice school psychologists to facilitate the implementation of the regular education initiative in rural schools. Rural Special Education Quarterly, 11(3), 20-28.

Levine, J. M. & Wang, M. C. (1983). Teacher and student perceptions: Implications for learning. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

McKeown, B., & Thomas, D. (1988) Q Methodology. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Meyen, E., & Skrtic, T. (1995). Special Education and Student Disability. Denver, CO: Love Publishing.

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (1996). Summary of the 17th Annual Report to Congress on Special Education. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

Reid, D. K., Robinson, S., & Bunsen, T. (1995). Empiricism and beyond. Remedial and Special Education, 16, 3, 131-141.

Schumm, J., Vaughn, S., Gordon, J., & Rothlein, L. (1994). General education teachers beliefs, skills, and practices in planning for mainstreamed students with learning disabilities. Teacher Education/Special Education, 17, 22-37.

Stricklin, M. (1993). Factor analysis programs for Q techniques PCQ (Version Three). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

U.S. Dept. of Education (1991). Thirteenth Annual Report to Congress on Implementation of IDEA. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Services No. ED 332 488)

Vaughn, S., Schumm, J. S., Niarhos, F. J., & Gordon, J. (1993). Students' perceptions of two hypothetical teachers' instructional adaptations for low achievers. The Elementary School Journal, 91, 87 - 102.

Zigmond, N., & Thornton, H. (1985). Follow-up of postsecondary age learning disabled graduates and drop-outs. Learning Disabilities Research, 1 (1), 50-55.